The World is for Us

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The World is for Us

by Vagabond_Anon

Summary

She figured in her strange heart that life is just like a button box. An eclectic collection of odds and ends connected by the threads that brought them individually together. Each and every one treasured forever.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

The warm days of summer had been left at the chain link fence she had come through. The concrete under foot was cracked and swept smooth at its edges by salty sea air. Her steps careful to avoid the rusty orange bones jutting out of the corpse of a behemoth that was a road bridge in what felt like a lifetime ago. Beyond them though, and the remains of once mighty columns, and the small sparse dotting of green from those weeds tenacious enough to colonize the ruin, Satsuki reached the worn edge of the concrete slab. Gingerly she took off her shoes and sat down letting her legs dangle over the end of the earth. The beginning of the sea that came forth in waves to crash against the material some decent ways down below her toes. The air it sent upward still tickled with the licks of cold.

She looked out across the bay. Toward a shore that was no more.

The evening sun still beat down a warmth through her light jacket. The same sun had kept the concrete all about her bleached as white as the day it had cured. Its power radiating back up from the great mass to warm her through her pencil skirt.

The same sun she had once borrowed to help control the masses like the priests of olden times in so many corners of the world.

She crossed her arms and grabbed at her biceps to suppress a shiver.

Perhaps she owed Amaterasu an apology.

She owed many people apologies.

From within her jacket she took out a small paper lantern. Carefully assembled she put a tea light within it and went to light it. But the pocket was empty. She patted her various pockets down decidedly sure she had taken it with her. Absconded with it really from the other's effects, but they had really lost the care of who actually owned what among small possessions years ago. From a ways behind footsteps crunched. Each step disturbing chips and pebbles under foot. She turned to find Ryuko had successfully tracked her down. And in one of Ryuko's hands was a plastic lighter spun about her fingers.

“Ya know as the voice of *reason* in our lives, usually, you are about the last person I had ever and I mean *ever* pegged as a sneak out to smoke kinda bitch.” She patted down at the space beside her and waited for Ryuko to take a careful seat as well. In her own

hands she turned the lantern about.

“I will have you know I would never take up smoking. Especially behind your back.”

“So why ya ditchin me for car service?”

“For a commitment of the most important kind. I'm sorry I forgot to tell you. I was probably too focused on getting here before nightfall.”

Ryuko gave her an affirmative hum.

“So I see you have a little lantern boat, and we are sitting on the closest thing to the worst piece of land one could call a dock in existence overlooking what once was. I know its been a while, but I kinda know a thing or two about stuff never really going away despite any number of whiles being given... What's on your mind Satsuki?”

Satsuki smiled to herself.

“Goodness using my full name? Well, I suppose such sincerity is owed a proper explanation this time around. At least so much as I can give one.”

“This time around?”

“Do you know what day it is?” Ryuko scoured her brain for a possible missed planned date night or other such outing with a deep sinking feeling. Which Satsuki put an end to with a gentle squeeze of her knee. “before you give yourself a heart ache, no you are not forgetting anything promised to me.”

Ryuko sheepishly shrunk her shoulders forward.

“Uh, good cause I uh scheduled ya know... later.”

“Yes. I would not miss it for the world.”

“So what am I forgetting that isn't urgent, yet still so important?”

“One could argue the most important day of the whole affair was the final day we marched to the final battle, and you ended it all. But after giving it so many years of thought I would actually say the most important day of the whole war was not then. No, the most important day was the day you transferred to Honnouji, stuck a blade at my nose, and put yourself on a path shattering everything I had ever known.”

Ryuko was taken aback.

“Arguments sake, sure, yeah. *You memorized the day?”*

“But of course my dear. It isn't just any day that someone does that to a person, especially when uninvited to do so. Especially when one will have regrets forever about how it had been handled. About how everything had been handled.”

“We've... been over it.”

“We have.”

“You know how I feel.”

“I do.”

“But yer still gonna torment yourself?”

“Not on purpose. Not actively. Perhaps torment would be too strong a word for it even. We will live on. *We* live on. May I have the lighter?” Ryuko handed it over and watched Satsuki carefully light the little tea candle inside the paper lantern. “Thank you.” Prepared and glowing from within Satsuki lobbed the lantern forward toward the bay. It hit the crest of a small wave and bobbed its way up and down, back and forth, until the current took it from beneath their feet and carried it out toward the center of the bay. Its small light refusing to be extinguished despite the roughness it was being subjected to.

Just like her one and only Imouto.

“An odd way to celebrate meeting your... wife?”

“I make no claims that it is anything other than odd. But I will clarify that its for the *Alma Mater*. For being what brought us together at last.”

“I'm not going to start saying it was a good rock.”

“Entirely fair. It wasn't a good place. Necessary it can be argued, but not good.”

“But.”

“*But.*”

“It brought good people together.”

Once more Satsuki smiled as this time she leaned to the side and put her head on Ryuko's shoulder. “Exactly.” They both sat and watched the sun dip below the sky line, and the small light of the lantern be swallowed up by the many little reflections from the skyscrapers of the city blinking alive. Eventually Satsuki uncrossed her arms and looked down at her watch.

“We should probably get going if we don't want to be late.”

“That would be real bad yeah.”

Satsuki pulled her legs back up onto solid ground and slipped into her heels. She stood up and brushed off salt and dust before extending a hand to Ryuko to help pull her up to her feet as well. Neither letting go even as Ryuko turned to give her a smack on the rear.

“Ya missed a spot!”

“Must you?”

Ryuko just gave her a very toothy grin on the way back to the car. Secure in the red little trooper Ryuko started the drive into the city. A question still lingered.

“So we've been trying to sell off everything not being used right? Why do we still own that dump?”

“Despite being waterfront property on Tokyo bay the particulars of that singular property are difficult to say the least.”

“Such as?”

Satsuki sighed as she leaned back in the seat to look up through the upper glass half of the door above her.

“When construction began the road bridge was acquired through a series of very unorthodox procedures in land procurement. If the deed is transferred by sale every single step in the process would need to be retroactively vetted by by the zoning commission, and a lot of lawyers would be involved. Which is expensive. The land parcel itself is too narrow to be used as a dock for Panamax container ships, so only local vessel operators would be able to use it. Which limited the buyer pool a bit.”

“I get a neighborhood full of warehouses yeah, but its like nobody else wanted to build a specialty restaurant or some shit there?”

“Due to the way the bridge was demolished in an *uncontrolled manner* the concrete foundation itself is damaged. We got rid of the road deck itself for being a hazard that could have fallen into the shipping lane, but any new construction would first have to include a complete demolition and removal of the concrete and steel bridge foundation. No certificate of occupancy will be issued by the municipal government until a new foundation is poured from the dirt up, and thus certifiably stable. The bidders we had left for the property wanted that work to be done by us. Which is fair in such negotiations, but the estimated cost of that work even at the cheapest of prices exceeded every bid offered for

the land itself. When you are trying to raise liquidity by liquidating assets that does not help. So we set it aside and Hoomaru continued with other properties. Years have gone by now and still nothing has been offered that would make the sale justifiable."

"So we're just going to keep it then?"

"Honestly at this point it serving as a memorial of what happened is probably the best that can be hoped for."

"Yeah?"

"I never really planned for what to do after everything was said and done. At times I had a vague notion of renovating the island and turning it into a college. A proper place of education and research for purposes other than war. Give the students who had given their high-school lives a college life in an actual college. Clubs and classes not twisted into militarized training regimes."

"Why didn't you then? Aside from the obvious. But like in those couple weeks where you were kinda dead inside?"

"Every time I thought of it I also reasoned that nobody would ever sign up to attend a school I am connected to ever again."

"You got the name back on clothes though which I would say was probably a shit ton harder."

"By borrowing the credibility of others, such as yourself."

"I'm sure you could have done it eventually. You are *The* great Satsuki Kiryuin after all."

"Why do I detect a waft of sarcasm mixed with thine words of comfort?"

"Me? Sarcastic? Ribbing you? *Naw.* Never."

"As *the queen bee* in charge as you put it so succinctly I would not stand for such treatment."

The car stopped at a red light, and they both turned to look at each other. And both broke out into giggles at the exaggerated expressions they had both given of mock outrage.

"Queen pain in my ass."

"Mm, and a two in one in mine."

At the next light Ryuko fully turned in her seat to stare in bewildered awe.

“Hold up. Hold the *fuck* up. Was *that* what you were thinking in Osaka!?”

Satsuki just coyly shrugged.

“It may have crossed my mind in the heat of the moment.”

“*Ohhh really* now I *need* to know what level of shit talking I've been missing out on.”

“You're missing a green light.”

“Shit-”

“As for unsaid thoughts I hate to disappoint, but when it comes to the passionate possible responses left unsaid my memory isn't so perfect. Perhaps one here or there. I *can* recall the sunset before the Raid trip though.”

Ryuko's knuckles tightened on the wheel, but only for a moment.

“Did you really have to take him?”

“At the time with the information I had? Yes, absolutely. But I would insist for the record I intentionally *didn't*.”

“Most of him.”

“Once I got there I could not overlook a resource made available to me regardless of the source. I still don't fully grasp what compelled me to rush down the island when the fight broke out to begin with. Why on earth I figured it had to be Harime. But I stopped your untimely execution, tried to make sure you would not catch a chill *or tetanus* on that roof which would have made the rescue pointless, and could do nothing publicly more than look down at the anguish in your face. *Think what was I supposed to do with such a woman.* And then bemoan the existence of my own broiling confusion on why I cared so much about such a woman. My first instinct was to take you back to the tower and have you checked for tortuous injury left behind by the *human shaped puppet*. But I could not do that. Its fortunate that I knew Aikuro was keeping tabs on you and saving you from time to time likely because of his affiliations.

“Wait wait wait, *That's* why you turned up? Me?”

“Upon my return to Iori with an armload of Kamui scraps he was thoroughly confused that I *had* been concerned for your safety to such a degree. Enough to possibly jeopardize my own standing in Ragyo's corporate death machine to ensure your continued survival. I have apologized for it profusely, but I was raised thinking I knew what the path to success required. What sacrifices had to be made. When to take the knee and bear the abuse. When to cut away

dead weight. With the clarity of hindsight deep down I know I wanted to be proved wrong. To have a heroic fire brand burst into my life and prove to me that my mission to save the human race was worth it because a human being could overcome being consumed by greed, by malice, by the ills that paint our society into a bleak portrait. Time and again you had fought to prove to me that my notions on the nature of Man were wrong. Had none of that happened then its very likely your loss in combat would have been the end of your usefulness, and thus curtail my intervention... I can't say I ever envisioned such a person to be so abrasive. At the time I wasn't sure if I should be furious or not at that, and those moments are where my thoughts drifted to less... constrained places we could say."

"Didn't exactly leave a suggestions box for polite requests anywhere."

"That is very true. Painfully true. The results speak for itself. Sometimes the only way to clean something is to apply enough abrasive force to scrub it clean."

Satsuki returned to staring at nothing in particular outside the car in silent thought. Road noise a comfortable blanket of something to occupy the senses. Until Ryuko drew her back to earth.

"What would you have done had I won?"

"When?"

"Our first proper fight. In front of the whole school. After I worked out how to be a proper *two in one pain in your ass* with Senketsu."

"If you had been demonstrably more powerful? Completely and thoroughly achieving victory? Well... I couldn't have afforded to lose you at such a point. Starting with being unable to tell you what you wanted to know. I couldn't just let you storm after REVOCS alone after proving to be more valuable than basically the entire academy including myself. If you had bested me in single combat through raw force it would have been the utmost imperative to induct you into the plan. See about how to properly train you to focus that strength into what would have been the most likely key to victory. Everything that could be offered would have been to convince you to lend your strength."

"But not the answer. The one thing I wanted?"

"You would have been a flight risk if you had no reason to stay or return. That's why I lied at times, which I again apologize for. At that point an answer would have to be at most included with the bargain on provisions of your cooperation."

“Bargain? Going back on your word would have made your word worth nothing. What then?”

“Ryuko.”

“Yes?”

“Do you want a truthful answer?”

“Yeah.”

Satsuki bit her lip and waited for the next red light. Because she already knew how her answer would be taken.

“You know how deeply invested I was in Ragyo's demise. More so than anyone else probably ever will.”

“*Yeah.*”

“My dear *dear* Ryuko. If you had proven to be the greatest possible chance I had to kill her, unarguably and unquestionably, off the bat? You *specifically?* Your morals, your ability to work with Senketsu effortlessly without losing yourself, your... I admit physical form to a small degree. If my word was not acceptable then I would have had no choice but to put my actions to where my word was. I would not accept being degraded or demeaned, but I would have given you anything even my very body itself if need be. My everything was devoted to ultimate victory. So long as it did not interfere with the plan in motion I could have probably gone so far as to cordially invite you to thoroughly *ruin me* whenever you *bloody wished*.”

True as she could guess when she looked over Ryuko was a glowing fire. Which dipped forward to put her forehead to the top of the wheel and bury her even redder face.

“Do you *realize* how close I was to getting up and continuing that fight?”

“We were both utterly exhausted at that point. I walked away because you had proven you had significant potential, and I honestly again felt deep down like I wanted to see you succeed in everything you said you would. I also direly needed to get Junketsu off me.”

“I had just gotten my second wind and still had gas in the tank. Are you telling me you were spent?”

“Heavily.”

“You fucking *bluffed* out of that!?”

“I did. Not the only time either. You were a formidable sparring

partner.” Ryuko gave her another look which was met with raised hands. “Twas a war my dear, a war. Had the first fight continued I probably would have been consumed.”

“If I had been given an opening I would have gone for the kill swing on him, *it?* And absorbed the fibers.”

“And if it had killed me? Or worse, *you did?”*

Ryuko opened her mouth to answer, to offer some rebuttal, but couldn't make a noise. What would she have done had that happened? The scissor blades swung in anger were only destroying uniforms because she knew how to hold back just enough. If for any reason that blade wasn't turned at the last second they would cut flesh and bone extremely easily.

Too easily.

Satsuki could see the painful unease cross over her.

“Such is the fate of *what ifs* in war. We could say whatever we wish theory wise now because we have that benefit of hindsight. Had you known the true extent of your powers, had you the temperament to take being trained seriously, perhaps it all could have gone very differently. The same can be said of even the slightest mistake or misstep for negative outcomes. In the moment we did what we did, as that is how our response to what was going on at the time was conditioned to do. Its for the best we don't let ourselves get caught up in the what if.”

“Yeah... *Yeah.”*

As Ryuko continued driving Satsuki stole one of her hands to intertwine their fingers for the rest of the ride. Her thumb running a gold ring on Ryuko's finger round and round.

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Upon their arrival to the address they found a sea of motorcycles, vans, and wildly built cars. On the road itself a man in a black *staff* shirt hand directed them to where a parking spot had been reserved behind the building. Ryuko took her guitar case out from behind the seats and slung it over her shoulder. Once inside through a back door the chaos of *gig setup* was well underway among brickwork and old torn up band posters.

“Quite the mess.”

“Nah, this ain't shit. Floors are clear and no vomit on the walls nowhere. Solid seven out of ten. Wait up. Hey, hey guy!” She grabbed a man running cable and was directed to where the dressing

rooms were. “Shit a men's and women's? I revise my rating eight out of ten stars they put some care into things.

“Truly a high rating for the highly coveted *Ryuko list of backroom slums.*”

“Hey I basically raised myself in these backroom slums. Put respect on that list.” Satsuki's posture deflated like a holiday decoration with a heavy sigh. Ryuko stopped, turned, and pulled her in for a one armed hug. “Look I lived in a couple, you built a couple, neither of us shed a tear if and or when they burned to the ground.” Satsuki raised a single eyebrow powerfully high and it was Ryuko's turn to shrug coyly. “Some places were just *not* meant to stay standing, I think we established that today.” For good measure Ryuko tapped the nearest wall with a knuckle. “See? Here we're *fine.*” Satsuki still had reservations but she bid Ryuko good luck with a kiss before separating to find where the organizer in charge was.

Per some directions given. She left the backrooms and made her way out into the dimly lit open space of a bar proper. It was packed to the rafters with people and leather. At the bar itself she managed to get an open stool and waited for the short woman on the other side to finish arguing into a hand radio.

“Ditch the extra rigs we don't have the space or power... Yeah I patched into the local speaker set we'll use them as the fill instead. Over and out.”

“Busy as a bee can be?”

Nonon spun around and beamed.

“Finally! Both of you made it okay?”

“Indeed we did. Everything going well?”

“As well as we can expect given,” she leaned in close to whisper the rest. “*How shit of a venue this is.*”

“I have been informed by a very reliable source that it is in fact not bad on the scale of such places.”

“Satsuki there's a *long* list of issues with the acoustics in here alone. Power is flaky. Space is at a premium for everything. *Occupancy limit* is a discarded suggestion.”

“And yet here we all are. Speaking of who else has been roped into this little event?”

“Dog's making sure we won't blow anything up and I got people from central helping bounce the doors. Oh and-... speak of the devil.” When the stool beside Satsuki's was vacated by a man with multiple

drinks in hand the large frame of Tsumugu slid onto the seat. “The meathead tagged along.”

Tsumugu disregarded her and signaled the very busy barkeeper to slide two beers over. In short order two open bottles came across the wood bar top to his hands. He pushed one towards her. It was hesitantly taken.

“To what do I owe the pleasure on this fine evening?”

“You went missing.”

“I can have a private life.”

“Without *her?”*

“A regrettable oversight on my part for which I have already apologized. She can always find me whenever she wishes though. And I can only guess so can you.”

He snorted, but raised his bottle towards her.

“I will tell you two things tonight. First, I'm here because I'm off the clock. Second, it was a question. *Relax.”*

That was not what she had expected.

“Well this is unusual for you.”

“I don't spy on your personal life. It's the professional endeavors which became a tad suspicious even you must admit. But you've done well enough to keep your noses clean. Figured I'd just say hello. Enjoy your night.”

She rose the one she had been given and accepted the toast with a clink.

“And you the same.”

They both took their first sip. With that out of the way he left the stool to make his way into the crowd. Satsuki turned back to the bar and Nonon was already getting a bucket she pushed back.

“You sure?”

“Yes. Thank you though. As I have been thoroughly informed by my other half *the best beer is a free beer*, and who am I to deny such wisdom.”

Nonon picked up a bottle of water and flipped it with a toss.

“Suit yourself. Will you stay here?”

“Probably. Seems to have a decent view of the stage. No private booths available above I reckon.”

“That would be correct. Just some grumpy looking *natives*. Ask the barman if you need me or anything else, he knows you're a plus one.”

Nonon left for the back rooms to whip the front line into shape leaving Satsuki to lean against the bar and wait for the show to begin. It wasn't too terribly long. Soon enough stands and a drum set were up on stage, and a handful of punk looking musicians took their places to cheers. Ryuko's own wild black and red hair emerged among them stuffed in a black beanie, her clothes from work hidden by a leather jacket and heavy biker jeans. With guitar in her hands she took her place beside another woman with a bass and scanned over the crowd to find Satsuki, and gave her a wink. Satsuki raised her bottle up earning her a smirk. Satsuki gestured to the room as explanation before Ryuko got back to business tuning up.

At the head of the stage a large man with a Mohawk made of spikes shrugged off his own jacket and tossed it to a stage hand. Left in a black tank top he took a microphone in hand and tapped it alive stilling the crowd. The lights above shining off black sunglasses on his face.

“We live? We live! How we doing tonight!”

Cheers answered.

“Shit we should have brought the loud amps for this one!”

The floor erupted in a rhythmic stomp of boots as the drummer began to loosen up his hands. The singer took the microphone off its stand and pulled a good amount of cable up to give himself slack to walk with it across the stage.

“Hope y'all are ready for some noise!”

The crowd was chanting, *”Bring it on! Bring it on!”*

“Well we got something special for you tonight! We got something NEW! Are you READY!”

He let the excitement boil over until he eventually put out his hand to still the wild mass of people. Satsuki could only assume they all fit the definition of *metal heads* as it had been described. Snapping his fingers he swept his hand around and pointed to Ryuko.

On her cue she brought her red weapon to bear, started tapping her toes, and the chords came fast and hard. He began to sing.

"*The desire, to destroy,*"

Guitar reverb rang out as she was joined by the drummer, and bassist.

"*To disrupt, to lose control,*"

Satsuki reached into her jacket and produced two small ear plugs she discretely put into place. Just muffling enough to prevent *damage.*

"*To rebuild, and then...*"

She regarded the beer bottle in her hands once more, and took a solid gulp.

When in Rome.

"*TO TEAR IT DOWN AGAIN!*"

Fortified she braced herself as Ryuko animatedly worked through a solo.

The family charisma channeled into a pure *noise.*

Nonon reemerged from her tasks to take the empty stool beside Satsuki. She noted the shorter woman just let her radio hang off its belt clip despite some static coming through of maybe a voice. Satsuki nudged her to give her hand signs.

Not working?

Nonon leaned in to shout into her ear.

"The train has left the station and jumped the rails. There is NOTHING that can be done now but watch it unfold, be ready to fix anything that breaks, and maybe watch the whole building turn into a riot!"

"Are we expecting one!?"

"Satsuki if you wanted to be safe you wouldn't have married her!"

"Is a riot actually likely!?"

Nonon swept her hand out toward the crowd going wild.

"Likely? No! Impossible? Also no!" Satsuki looked out over it all once again wondering what on earth she had signed up for. Nonon tapped her arm to get her to lean over again. "You feel that? You feel this raw energy!? That, that is what makes it special and worth it to do this! Nothing else like it anywhere! If anything happens get out the back door! Otherwise sit back and enjoy the

ride!”

Satsuki finished the rest of her beer and realized she had started tapping her own foot in time with the base beat of the song. Through the second song she'd had two more and started to sway in time as well. Lost in the waves of motion ebbing and flowing among the masses. By the end of the set she'd had at least four more. Maybe five. The crowd was going nuts cheering.

She found herself surprisingly upset that the music had stopped.

The sweat drenched singer took a towel offered to him to wipe his face off.

“Thank you all!”

The speakers of the bar came alive once more with the far more subdued radio fair as the band took a break. From her corner of the stage Ryuko let her guitar fall to its strap and reached up her arms to literally flag down the bartender. Her hand motions were entirely incomprehensible to Satsuki, until the last one was a finger pointed right at her. She turned in place to find the bartender had put a six pack beside her and gave her a thumbs up. Back to Ryuko and she was given a beckoning wave.

A mission most important it seemed.

Satsuki picked up the precious cargo, slid off her stool, and immediately stumbled about two steps forward before she stopped and regained her bearings. That was new. Around her were at least half a dozen people asking if she was alright and all she decided she could manage was to give them a thumbs up, which was met with a small round of cheering inexplicably. She successfully compensated for the uneasy ground well enough as she restarted forward.

Politely she poked the backs of various people excusing herself forward through the crowd. Until an exceedingly fit man studded from head to toe like a snow tire turned around to face her.

“What?”

“I seek passage on this route, please and thank you.”

“Stage?”

“On a quest most important.”

He was a man of exceedingly few words, and looked incredibly annoyed. He produced some kind of unintelligible mumble in response. Satsuki frowned at him. Unblinking stared right back at him daring him to try and stop her mission. He swallowed harshly and turned around. With his mouth cupped by his hands he produced

an immense bellowing yell,

“MAKE A HOLE!”

He then turned in place to let her pass to an open corridor of space. As she went he gave her a short nod of his head upward. She could only figure this was a native greeting of the wild rock denizen serving as an Alpha lion of the herd, and thus it was appropriately responded in kind. Which was received successfully. In no time she reached the stage.

Upon reaching the edge Ryuko hopped down to meet her and kissed her. It was supposed to be a short little thing. Satsuki decided that was not enough and would not let her lips go. Satsuki just leaned forward more and more uncaring for what that would do to their balance point. Eventually Ryuko physically took her by the shoulders and pushed her back up to standing.

“How many have you had tonight Sats?”

Satsuki had to think about it earnestly.

“Seven. Seven? Seven!”

Satsuki presented the cargo to be taken from her hands and watched Ryuko lob bottles to her present band mates. Each one using some part of their kit to pop off caps and raise toasts one by one in thanks to Satsuki. At the last two bottles Ryuko took one and stopped.

“You okay?”

“I am learning the customs of the locals. I have been given the greeting, and found these beverages get better the more I have. Its a strange phenomenon. How are you my lovely dear?”

“Getting the old work out on ya know, pretty good vibes actually.”

“You *are* good at vibes yes.”

Ryuko sucked in air through her mouth and held it. Satsuki smiled.

“You *sure* you're good?”

Satsuki took a fistfull of jacket and pulled Ryuko in.

“I will decide when and if I am not good Imouto. I can take anything thrown at me as I always have. And right now I am having a *wonderful time thank you.*”

“Really?”

Satsuki pouted at her. Ryuko got a glint in her eye and let a

smirk grow from the side of her mouth.

“Well. If you're so sure.”

“I am always sure.”

“Would you like to keep having a good time?”

Satsuki looked at her processing that.

“*Go onnnn.*”

Ryuko took the last two bottles and held one out to her. Satsuki took it and looked at the cap. Ryuko took her bottle and lined up the caps to be side by side with their grooves interwoven. With a pull both came tumbling off at the same time. Satsuki was going to take a sip but Ryuko stopped her and held her arm up. With instruction she got Satsuki to loop her arm holding the bottle around it.

“Apart from the one time which doesn't really count have you *ever* been drunk before?”

“Never in my life, but so far so good!”

Ryuko started laughing. And Satsuki joined in entirely willing to partake in the mirth. They both drained their bottles in one long chug finished to an eruption of cheers around them.

“Your on now Sats.”

“I am on *something* yes and finding it pleasant if disorienting. But only just enough, I think. What are you thinking?”

Freed of the intertwining Ryuko went over to the singer and bid him to kneel down to her from the stage. Satsuki couldn't make out the conversation. She was mostly upset at being ignored by Ryuko. But that subsided after the woman accepted a powerful handshake the man clapped down at her and she returned to Satsuki.

“Okay Sats can you throw out this cardboard-”

“A simple matter for I.”

“And find the short one to tell her we need to get this party mobile.”

“I can do this. Why am I doing this?”

“You want the whole experience right? Even if we go a *lot* longer than planned?”

“I committed myself to doing this, and being there for your

endeavors. I will see it through.”

Satsuki turned back in the direction of the bar and began to march. She now knew proper procedure.

“MAKE A HOLE!”

The full might of Kiryuin Satsuki gave her the corridor she demanded without question. Only a few steps into her march though Ryuko called out.

“Love ya babe!”

Satsuki stopped in place, whirled around unsteadily and in a complete one eighty of tone gushed back a bubbly.

“I love you *toooo!*”

And immediately went back to business mode as she continued forward.

Ryuko couldn't stop smiling as she took an offered hand pulling her back up on stage.

“Oh this is gonna be *goooooood.*”

The singer held on to her though.

“What made ya change yer mind?”

“I got permission.”

“That was the missus?”

“Yeah!”

“Then a last minute tour it is!”

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The announcement was met with roaring applause. Calls to other venues were made, and a paper road atlas opened to plot a course. Nonon wasn't sure if she should pull her hair out, or throw a party. Her cooperation was secured when Satsuki handed her a beer can.

“Everyone should get to enjoy themselves.”

Nonon stared at it, at Satsuki, and then over to Ryuko shooting back two thumbs up.

“Yolo it is.”

Any crew that couldn't continue were left to clean and go home. But a good number of brave souls volunteered to *the cause* on the spot. Everybody wanted to see where this was going to go. During the packing of vans, and a lone converted bus owned by the band, Nonon approached Ryuko in the parking lot and pulled her aside.

“Have you lost your marbles?”

“No, its gonna be great. You tryin to tell me you aren't excited?”

“I didn't say that, but I feel like I'm the last person remembering we have work tomorrow.”

“Everything critical has been handled, everything left can stand being delegated for a bit.”

“Actual insanity.”

“You know you love it!”

“I know I do that's why I'm frustrated!”

They both stopped when they saw Satsuki exit the building. Somehow she had acquired a duffle bag, and from within it was producing beers and water bottles she was shockingly adept at throwing to various crew members hands when asked. When a random guy tried to whistle for her attention and made rude demands she gave him a raised middle finger. She approached the two women upon noticing them.

“I cannot stand idle during great enterprise so I have taken up a job!”

Nonon smiled politely while holding back a lot of emotions. Ryuko lost her shit and doubled over laughing.

“W-Welcome to the crew?”

“When do we leave?”

Nonon turned to Ryuko and elbowed her. She stood back up and wiped tears from her eyes.

“That's a *you* question now *ma'am.*”

“Already worth it. I am *SO* happy we are doing this right now.” She spotted the singer across the parking lot and waved at him. “OI KENJI!”

He yelled back.

“Yeah!?”

“Loaded!?”

“Yeah!”

“We'll be hitching a ride!”

“Solid!”

She let him get back to his business.

“Looks like now. Got a spare radio short stuff?”

Nonon went to a mobile trunk in the back of a van and from within it produced a walkie talkie she lobbed back over to Ryuko.

“Channel three. Next stop is expecting us in an hour.”

“Let's go ride some lightning. Come on Sats we are grabbing a bus. You?”

“I'm in with a rig van. Got to make some phone calls and going to need the peace and quiet to do it. See ya when we stop Red.”

Before they parted though she grabbed Ryuko's sleeve for one more thing.

“You *are* making sure she's going to be okay right?”

“I'm keeping a feel on her vitals. I've got it.”

“You better.”

“I know!” Ryuko and Satsuki boarded the bus and gave hellos to the drummer sitting behind the wheel. Settled in the RV interior Ryuko pulled out the paper atlas they had and taped it down to a table in a kitchenette near the front. She took a seat on a bench beside it by Satsuki, who tried to kiss her but settled for being held as Ryuko got a finger on her wrist.

All the inner bits were still working. Blood alcohol surprisingly okay.

“*Imoutooo....*”

“*Yer fine, was just making sure.*”

Kenji was the last aboard. He stood beside the table and asked for the radio Ryuko had been given. As he held onto a railing overhead he also held down the button to talk on the walkie.

“Convoy this is Band, fall in behind us in the bus. No barricades

will stop us and nothing sane will dare get in our way. No matter what happens do not lose the convoy. Do not make unplanned stops. Do not let people break through our line and separate us. Gas and piss breaks will be planned and announced so don't worry. And most importantly of all lets *have some fun!”*

The bus horn blared as the convoy got under way on a heading south west toward Yokohama. The Vans all beeped in solidarity. Followed by a long mass of bikes and cars determined to keep up.

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Satsuki woke up to a soft twangy strumming of a muted electric guitar, and an accompanying humming carried across her by sea air. She felt like lead weighed down every limb, and her head pounded horribly. She forced an eye open and hated the light for existing in opposition to her will. Minutes went by as she just lay there listening to Ryuko just go on and on in a song that never seemed to end. She could now see the ceiling was very unfamiliar. Stained and pealing with age it was an off white mess of poorly applied paint. She didn't want to begin to comprehend the state of everything else. But she continued to lie there breathing.

A knock on wood put pause to the song. She heard Ryuko set down what was likely her guitar on a hard surface and cross a carpeted floor to answer the door. Its hinges gave the smallest protest before her voice returned in one side of a conversation she could hear.

“Hey man thanks for grabbing a bag for me... Yeah... No it was great... I told you Kenji I can't take the money... Oh fine, shit... Yeah. Hey tell yer man we said get well soon, and thanks for letting me jam... Of course, we loved it..... I wish I could sometimes ya know? But I got... Yeah.... No, yeah... I will... I did! Thank you... Oh of course... Sorry about the bus bumper, never really drove one before but desperate times eh? Haha... Yeah we'll be heading back... So when's the wedding? Ha... No pressure, its just gotta be a hell of a good time if you call this work... Alright... Cya round.”

Softly the door was shut and Ryuko made her way back over to the other side of the room where the wind was coming from. Along the way a paper bag was deposited on a hard surface. As before the song started again. Satsuki tried to get up, but the humming stopped.

“Water on the table to yer right. Ibuprofen with it.”

She turned her head and found a bottle and pill as described on a

worn nightstand. Which reminded her of how dry her mouth felt. She managed to take hold of both and swallowed them quickly. Before falling back to the bed to stare upward once more. The whole while Ryuko hadn't stopped strumming away.

Some more time passed and the room grew a bit brighter. Satsuki wasn't sure if she had fallen asleep again or not. A rustle of fabric and impacts on upholstery made her turn her face left and finally see what was going on. Ryuko had nestled herself in the frame of a double wide sliding window with her right leg outside on the sill, and her left inside swinging her stocking clad leg back and forth over an AC floor splitter. Stripped down to her lingerie she kept just playing away smiling out toward the world outside the hotel room.

“Better?”

Satsuki finally sat up popping many joints along the way.

“*Better is a relative concept.*”

Ryuko just kept playing. Let her wake up at her own pace. Satsuki found herself stripped and couldn't see where any of her things were other than a pile of combined clothes on the room's lone sofa chair in the corner.

“I took anything ya felt like you would lose. Its all safe.”

She regarded the woman and blinked away thoughts of mind reading.

“Where are we?”

Ryuko finally stopped strumming long enough to think for a moment. Eventually just restarting with an answer of, “I know exactly where we are physically. Been here and it's trustworthy enough. No bedbugs, no lice, no mice. Clean sheets, no questions. I'd have to get back to ya on what the actual route to get here was or is. On the paper map I had we are somewhere between coffee stain two and dried mustard along the Kyushu coast.”

Satsuki rubber her eyes with her palms. Hard.

“I'm sorry did you just say *Kyushu?*”

“Yeah.”

“The bar was still in Tokyo?”

“Yeah.”

“That's a *thirteen hour* drive.”

“If you go directly, yeah.”

“What time is it?”

“Morning.”

The gears in Satsuki's brain started to turn again despite the haze. It was clearing up as the information she was getting was sinking in. And not really meshing.

“*Morning?* How long has it been?”

“About two days. *Ish.* Two mornings?”

Satsuki dropped her hands and stared at her.

“That's a joke, right?”

“Oh no I ain't lying.”

She grabbed at her stomach to suppress a growl.

At that Ryuko stopped playing and carefully put her guitar down in its case. She made her way over to a table along the wall across from the foot of the bed where a bag with grease spots awaited. Ryuko pulled out a chair and gestured her to it.

“*Really?*”

“Yeah.”

Satsuki struggled up and out of bed to shuffle to the place offered to her. Ryuko took a seat beside her on a second chair and split the bag open to parcel out foil containers of stuffs put down on napkins. She opened the one in front of Satsuki with a little *”ta da!”*

“What am I looking at?”

“Deep fried waffles with...” She pulled out a pack of fries to put next to the waffle container, and a little plastic cup of maple syrup. “A side.” An identical meal for Ryuko herself was opened and plastic cutlery doled out. Satsuki held up the plastic knife she had been given and bent the tip with her finger.

“How could something be so conceptually revolting look this appetizing?”

Ryuko spoke with a stuffed mouth.

“*Cause its good.*”

Reluctantly Satsuki dug in and devoured everything in short order. She felt like she hadn't eaten in days. Flashes of memories were

all she could conjure from her disjointed recent recollections. Some of which did include food though. Ryuko prodded her

"*Soooo...*"

"So?"

"So how was your first bender as a band groupie slash roadie?"

"My *what?*"

"The party they never stopped until the train came into the station. Or bus into the motel parking lot by the sea. Same shit. Oh by the way you are a *terrific* drunk."

"I'm *what!?*"

"You get all bubbly and happy. Its... well it was kinda real weird at first, but you are still usually polite and shit anyway. Super easy to be around for like regular people. Also *really* hardy but I guess that should be expected. Ain't no liver defects in this family."

Satsuki put her elbow on the table and held up her head. She stared deep into what remained of the syrup as if it could have some form of answers for her.

"I need to contact the office, I need to go back over the files for... oh gods, I need-"

Ryuko shushed her.

"Hey, it's all taken care of. Don't worry about it. I got the nerds on it the first morning. Everything's cool. Just relax."

"I heard something about driving a bus?"

"Yeah somebody had to which could pass field sobriety tests by the first night cause at that point *everybody* was starting to feel the sauce. Cops were getting real itchy and started waiting at the parking lots we were aiming to use to try and ambush people. I went through every one with flying colors. Was great seeing the looks on their faces."

"Where's the car?"

"Nonon got it moved to central parking. She's probably somewhere still around if she didn't book a redeye and went back as soon as the tour ended. We'll find her."

"How are *we* getting back?"

"This was all spur of the moment so I figure most everyone else

has scattered back to the wind by this point. Crew got picked up at about the same rate other crew turned back. We'll probably get a flight."

"When's the booking?"

"There isn't one." Satsuki turned to look at her once again like she had two heads. "I said relax! Everything will be *fine.*" Satsuki moved her palm under her chin and blew a stray hair away from her face.

"Do you realize just how sure of yourself you sound right now?"

"Cause I am. Not my first rodeo."

"You've done this before on your travels in... worse times?"

"*Yeah...* But things were different this time. A lot of things."

"Such as?"

"Did you have fun?"

"Don't dodge the question-"

"I ain't. Did ya have fun?"

Satsuki wished to say no, hangovers never sounded pleasant and currently the proof was very soundly in agreement. But she couldn't. As more scattered memories were coming back time and time again she found Ryuko smiling. Laughing with her. Everyone was enjoying the time spent. She herself had enjoyed the time spent with everyone.

In a small voice she answered.

"*Yes. I suppose.*"

And Ryuko mirrored the pose to give an equally small, "*Yeah.*" to match. "*You're* here this time. And I'm here not just scraping the bottom of the barrel to earn a scrap of money to buy a scrap of food and do it all again. A real band, on a real road trip, playing at real bars, for real audiences, with real people making a big moving convoy from place to place, playing for playing's sake. For real fun. With a lot of real drinking involved yeah, but also a lot of real good food you only find in the holes along the walls we travel by. Real good stories that last a life time. Thank you for agreeing to do this at least this one time."

"When do I get to blame the alcohol for that choice?"

"Too late! You already said it was a great time!"

Satsuki closed her eyes and breathed in and out.

“Fine. I'm glad it was worth it, at least once. Now, why am I naked?”

“Really hard to wash you when you're clothed.”

Satsuki hummed in agreement.

“One more question.”

“Yeah?”

“Where's the bathroom?”

Ryuko let her go and pointed to a door on the side of the short hallway leading out of the room.

“Right side-” Satsuki rushed before she could even finish and left Ryuko alone. “I'll have more water ready when you're empty!”

She heard a vague noise through the wall signaling she had been heard. With that sorted she opened a mini fridge to get two bottles out. She left one on the table and took the second with her to the window. Beyond the sill was a rocky beach below devoid of life, but unlike last time there were no tires and rusting cans. Just clean stones washed over and over by a great stretch of blue sea that ended at a land filled horizon.

She picked up her guitar once more and looked down at herself in the paint.

A little older.

A little wiser, *arguably*.

A little smile on her lips.

“Lot better then last time neh?” After taking a cold sip of water she returned to her place on the windowsill and started strumming again. Aimlessly and without a care. A luxury she had never dreamed of so many years ago on this very same windowsill.

End Notes

Work title is from the song title an animator on the show used as the title of his entry in KLK Bamboo artbook, and dedicated to Ryuko and Satsuki.

Lyric from *Archangel by Samurai*, by Refused.

For the mood at the end inspiration from the Eurodyne Yacht song.

Ten years of these two living rent free in my head.

No sign of it stopping before there's ten more.

Six years since we last visited this little idea.

That became so very not little at all...

Thank you for caring or sharing. For loving and hating. For liking and or subscribing. For everything, so far. Especially just reading.

Once more I beg forgiveness on scheduling, ask for understanding, and accept all that is given. When I realized the significance of the year things got shelved to make room for what needed to be done in my own terrible way. My contribution. For the occasion I went back to typing out everything just as I had last time. Until next time, be it in this cozy little corner of existence or far among the cold dead stars.

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